

before I leave again

2025/i.01

aubrey

A meditative
walk through
emotional
undercurrents,
held in the
pause before
departure





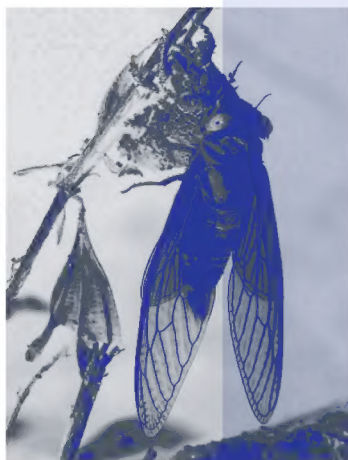
*before I leave
again*

To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perpetually with the environment that is itself pregnant with the past.

—Tim Ingold

The Temporality of the Landscape





To friend-leagues,

Thank you for offering clarity and joy when my mind unsettled.

To mom and dad,

Thank you for your faith, even when your own world felt uncertain. You affirmed the proof of who I was, who I am, and who I'm still becoming.

To myself,

Thank you for holding honesty for every feeling, and for continuing to move forward with courage.

And to you, the reader,

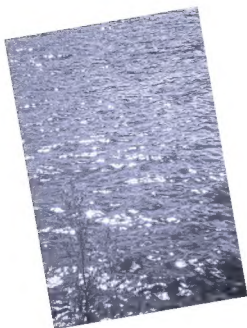
Thank you for picking up this zine. May it be a companion in this brief moment we share together.

before I leave again is a zine about slowing down and being present with the in-between, where emotional static lingers between departure and arrival. It's my way of sitting with that space, listening to what it's trying to say, and allowing myself to be felt and understood.

It began as an attempt to catalog what often slips by unnamed before absence takes place. I've always found that threshold between staying and going too layered to articulate, yet too meaningful to overlook. This zine, which holds memories of friends, the warmth of family, and conversations with versions of myself, is my way of making sense of it all before leaving my hometown and beginning a new journey somewhere else, again. It's deeply personal and ambiguous, in many ways.

But this zine is also for you. It's an invitation to pause and notice what emerges when nothing is rushed. Within these pages, you might find nostalgia, emotional residue, moments of vulnerability, or something entirely your own.

Whatever it is, let it arrive gently.



By reading this and 'walking' alongside me, I hope you'll offer yourself the same inward glance. I hope you'll find a moment to sit with your thoughts and feelings, even if they're messy or unfinished. And perhaps, if we're lucky, we'll both discover something honest by the end.



You and I, we're wanderers above
the sea of thoughts.

Take your time. Put on some music.
Breathe.

Imagine yourself outside, ready to
take a walk.

Shall we do it together?

Strolling Through My Night Walk Thoughts

Tonight, exactly three weeks before I leave again, I stepped out for a solo walk.

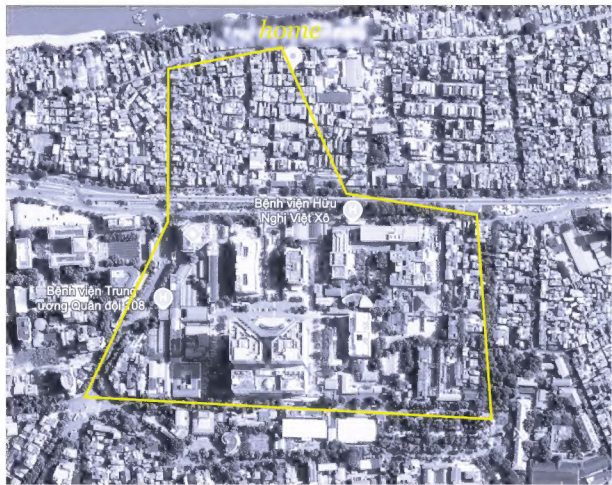
Night walks used to be a private ritual of mine back when I was living in Clermont-Ferrand two years ago. They were my way of tracing the edge between the outer world and whatever unspoken weight I carried inside. I never really cared about reaching a specific destination, as walking was more about making contact with place, with memory, and with all that remained unprocessed.

I walked to hear myself think, to locate myself not by direction, but by how the pavement responded under my feet. I remember chasing the wind down empty streets, letting it tangle my hair and loosen my scattered thoughts. I also remember looking up at the streetlamps until my vision became all blurry, and somehow, my mind felt clearer.

Back then, I believed walking was the purest and most honest form of intimacy with a place. There was tenderness in it. A sense that I didn't need to conquer the city to feel close to it, just brush against it and let it breathe back without any expectation. And before you knew it, you had already fallen in love.

That's how I fell in love with Clermont-Ferrand.

here's our road map



So, with my time in Hanoi thinning out again, you could say I was urged to return to what I knew. I want to press myself into the city, to make up for lost time and those unspoken tangible thoughts. To feel it as raw and honest one last time, before I leave again.

(1) marginalia

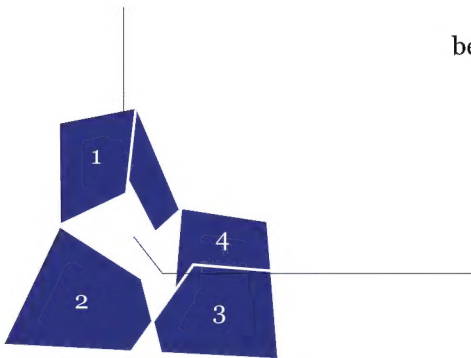
(2) finding my treasured pearls

(3) mom chops garlic, dad wears tank top

(home)

(4) on-going-back-to-where-i-came-from.png

before I leave again



(a conscious pause)
(пусть будет так)

*Transport,
motorways
and tramlines
Starting and
then stopping
Taking off and
landing
The emptiest of
feelings,
disappointed
people
Clinging onto
bottles
When it comes,
it's so, so
disappointing.*



*"One step outside, I told
myself I'd romanticize
nighttime Hanoi. The blur
of overexposed lights, the
hum of motorbikes
underfoot, the persistence
of grilled fish in the air,
lingering whether you
asked for it or not.*

*Two steps outside, the
noise—traffic, engines,
neighbors bickering, you
name it—was already
everywhere. It wrapped
around me before I even
reached the end of the
street. I actually had a
podcast playing at time
but I couldn't make out a
single word, and my body
felt like a stranger to
itself.*

*At some point, the
outside started to
chaos inside."*



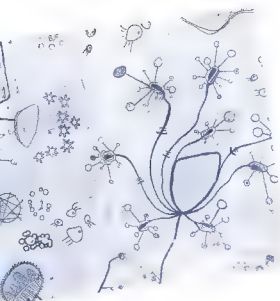
**None of the self-realization helped w
hollowed. None of the self-help lesso
when you're that cruel to yourself.**

By marginalia, here's the story.

e noise
mirror the

I started pursuing art and design at the age of 20. Still young, yes. But with no background, no prior interest, and definitely no natural talent, I pretty much learned everything by replicating others. I'd break down their techniques until I could make sense of them, then try them myself. It felt like the fastest way to catch up and quiet the insecurity about what I lacked.

But deep down, I knew it wasn't a healthy method. I was chasing perfection instead of learning for the joy of it. And the internet, as helpful as it is, can strip away your authenticity if you let it shape you too much.



And I saw it coming. Constantly measuring myself against curated work online and other people's so-called success only left me overstimulated and overidealistic. The more I compared, the more alienated and cynical I felt toward myself. That's not to say I wasn't trying to create things of my own. *But my art lacked substance.*

For the longest time, I felt stuck on the sidelines, caught between self-pity and overanalyzing others. I kept watching what was meant to inspire me, but the truth is, *I felt nothing genuine*. The margins became a dumping ground where self-denial drowned out clarity, and doubt rewrote every instinct before it could even speak. That self-perception fed a cycle of obsessive comparison and sabotage, where fear of not being enough slowly muted my creativity altogether.

What hurt most was instinctively knowing I should have stepped away. But I simply just couldn't. As a clear thinker, that was offensively unfortunate.

When I felt so
ons worked

2025 has been a much-needed reset for my creative headspace. I've been learning to really listen to myself again and give my creative endeavors the space they need to grow, somewhere that feels safe and clear. I mean, sure, I still have a lot to figure out. But one thing I've come to

terms with is that margins don't have to be chaotic. They can actually be where I give myself permission to pause,

take notes,
and observe
with
intention.



With all my marginalia time, I hope to discover where my ideal psychological state for

creativity lies, to admire the mess, reflect on the beauty within it, and slowly learn to hold it all (while prioritizing my own peace) with a little more tranquility.

And if I happened to have a big enough margin, here are the things I'd love to jot down. *#mantra_alert*

on-f-a-c-i-n-g-t-h-e-t-h-i-n-g-s-i-v-e-t-u-r-n-e-d-a-w-a-y-f-r-o-m
I have amazing friends who fill my life with joy. It doesn't matter if they don't
work in creative fields. What matters is the insight, the connection, the shared
moments I grow from. The world is so much more than just being creative.
When I crave creative connection, I can reach out to the right people. Open up,
be seen, be honest.

My voice is
carry echoes of
came before me,
belongs to me.
learning how to
I embrace my
self-doubt. I
to what feels
best and stay
myself be
n o t
the polished
p a s t .



mine. It may
those who
but it still
And I'm
amplify it.
flaws and
keep returning
true. I do my
grounded. I let
inspired—but
consumed—by
lives I scroll

I feed my
through books, movies, music, reflection, and curiosity. I stay open.
I set small, doable goals. I take one thing at a time and slow down when I
really need to.
If I stop creating, I know holistic cynicism will creep in. I don't want that. My
art can be messy. So can my thoughts. But they're mine, and I'll find my way
t h r o u g h .

I was named by my uncle on my mother's side. For most of my life, I disliked my name, partly because it matched that of a famous Vietnamese mathematician. I, however, was terrible at maths. It always drew unnecessary attention at school, and I painfully cringed every time someone called me by my full name. However, I later learned how proud my uncle was when he gave me that name: Bảo Châu, or *treasured pearl*, roughly translated. And suddenly, I started seeing my name as something more peaceful, or something I could grow into.



The more I lived, the more I began to see myself not just as a name but as a collection of moments, people, and the many stories I carry with me. I've collected so many treasured pearls during these past two years of living, working, pulling late nights and early mornings in Vietnam. They came from the people I met at work. Somewhere along the way, colleagues became friends, and friends became part of the story I now tell about myself.

So before I go, I want to leave behind a small letter to my friend-leagues.

Working at Raconteur was where so much of this story began. I met people who came in with their distinctive rhythms, and I got to sit beside them, listen in, learn, and grow. You all taught me things I didn't even know I needed to learn, and almost every day felt fun as I discovered something new, whether small or big.

Like, ask me now what subgenre of rap I like, and I'll say conscious rap with witty meaning. I'll list you names. I'll mean it. That's thanks to anh Pen, who got me listening closely and thinking deeply about lyrics I never thought I'd be interested in.

Or ask me for manga recs that are strange in the best way, twisted, kinky, niche, unforgettable, you name it, and I'll send you straight to chị Ly or Linh. Trust me, they've got a tasteful library of stories you didn't know you needed. I love them and our unhinged 2 A.M. conversations with all my heart.

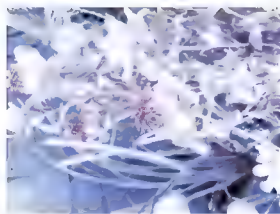
If someone asked how I became a bigger dog person, I'd point to Leo, the sweet old pup who visited our office now and then. I love those sleepy eyes of his more than I probably should.

And then there's Vy, who is the cutest, kindest, most down-to-earth girlfriend I've ever met (too late, might I add), who happens to be my favorite ENGINE and still owes me a ticket to an ENHYPEN concert. I adore her and our shared love for all things pretty and chaotic.

There's also anh Đạt, with his pitch-black humor and all the existential hilarity of being twenty-something. Still finding his path, and still one of my favorite minds to wander with.



2025 has been full of crossings so far, as I said goodbye to one team and stepped into another.



I'd like to picture myself a few months from now, sitting on a wooden bench somewhere in downtown Paris. Maybe I'll be flipping through a book of Parisian hidden gems, like the one I once found at chị Linh's place. Her home was so warm and thoughtfully put together it felt like a reflection of her. And we all agreed she had this effortlessly intentional way of noticing the world, right?

If someone then offered me a box of chocolate, I think I'd smile and think of chị Thanh, the gentle, motherly soul who always made sure I had enough every time we were at Haidilao. And if I ever happened to have a camera with me, I know the first thing I'd do is to scroll through chị Quyet's Instagram for a bit of inspiration. Her photos always spoke to me in ways I never really said out loud. If I told her, though, chances are she'd probably just laugh and say it wasn't that deep. But for me, it was.

Then there's chị Trang, the kind of designer who always brought every idea back to its purpose. Every time we talked, I came away feeling a bit more grounded, *like maybe I wasn't so lost after all*. I hope she knows just how much that meant. And of course, my one and only chingu Quank, who shared with me a love for hallway giggles and all silly conspiracies. I'd think back to that one hair show with just the three of us on the kỹ thuật team: Quank, me, and anh Long, living our most unhinged moments.

I'd stroll past shopfronts, half-looking for mannequins dressed in something chi Linh An might wear. I never got to tell her how good she looked in that purple chemist, though I really should have. I'd remember how kind and genuinely human she was as my manager. I'd probably think of the gossipy conversations she had with anh Duca too. They were peak sass, totally sitcom-worthy, and pure fun.

If it's raining and I've got music in my ears, chances are it's something chi Ly once recommended to me. I'd think of that rainy afternoon when she shared so openly, so warmly, and how we tried (and totally failed?) to keep our backs straight with those goofy stretches. She always checked in in small but thoughtful ways that truly moved me.

But above all, I'll miss my two bears most.

Mai Anh, the chaotic queen. We were always "whispering" while the whole room stayed focused, and our conversations spiraled into the most unexpected directions. That made perfect sense, anyway. When the cravings hit, she'd rope Bông into her mischief and order something absolutely sinful (xiên bẩn, I've decided to call her out). She would burst out in laughter when the rest of us judged her, and that's for sure.

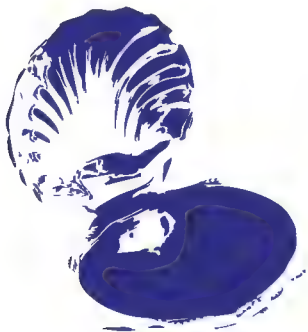
And Bông, my soul twin with the T in capital. The one with sharp thoughts, perfect earrings, and the best laugh, especially when K-pop was involved. She made me feel seen in the weirdest, yet warmest ways. She also sent me reels to fall asleep to. I probably didn't even check those 2AM TikToks until a few weeks later, but they still worked. Every time.

"In metabolizing these beautiful memories, I found myself less isolated. The noise somehow faded, and the road ahead began to sparkle a little."



I wonder if my teams will remember the little things about me, like I do them.

Because truthfully, getting to know people, having honest conversations, and sharing the messy parts of myself helped me stay grounded. It made me feel alive, even when everything around me was spinning.



So to you—*my friends, my fellow weirdos, thinkers, makers, and snack-orderers*—thank you.

You were never just part of my job. You were the proof that I lived, that I loved, that I paid attention. You've been part of my story in ways that are impossible to measure. You've been my treasured pearls, every single one of you.

Mẹ tôi năm nay gần 60. Mẹ sinh anh tôi khi mới 21 tuổi, còn tôi đến với mẹ lúc mẹ đã 35. Cả cuộc đời mẹ là một vòng xoay của đi làm, về chăm nhà, chăm chồng con, rồi lại đi làm. Mỗi ngày là một quỹ đạo không ngừng nghỉ.

Mẹ từng làm đủ thứ nghề. Hồi trẻ, mẹ là thợ cắt tóc. Có lần mở quán trà đá, rồi bán cà phê thuê, rồi trồng trọt, rồi bán rau ngoài chợ... Đâu đó, tôi còn nghe kể mẹ từng đi hậu cần cho đoàn làm phim. Thế mới nói mẹ tôi thật ra là người ưa giao lưu, không ngại học hỏi, đam mê những hành trình khám phá mà chẳng bao giờ nói ra. Nhưng từ ngày có gia đình, mẹ tự gác hết những mơ ước cá nhân sang một bên, lặng lẽ chọn ở lại với những gì thiết thực hơn.

Nghề gắn bó với mẹ lâu nhất là làm đầu bếp. Và mẹ nấu ăn giỏi, không phải kiểu mẹ hát con khen hay, mà là giỏi và khéo có tiếng. Tôi lớn lên trong niềm tự hào khi được ăn ngon mỗi ngày, và đặc biệt khi từng đưa bạn đến nhà tôi ăn cơm đều bảo: “Cơm mẹ mày nấu còn ngon hơn cả mẹ tao.”

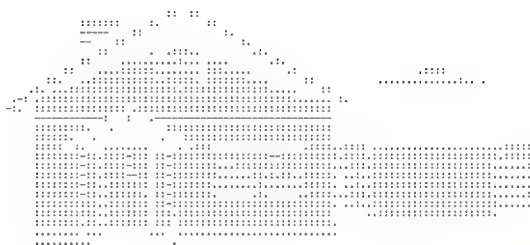
Mùi tỏi trên tay mẹ (2024)

Tôi phổng mũi, bạn tôi thì nào biết nói dối.

Cũng bởi nấu bếp từ sáng tới tối, cả ở cơ quan lẫn ở nhà, nên đôi tay mẹ lúc nào cũng ám mùi hành tỏi. Nhất là tỏi. Mùi tỏi đậm đến mức như thấm vào da thịt, không thể một, hai lần rửa mà sạch. Hồi bé, lúc nào mẹ bóc cam cho tôi, múi cam cũng thoảng mùi tỏi. Mẹ gọt táo cho tôi, miếng táo cũng ướp mùi tỏi. Mà tôi vốn là đứa không thích ăn hoa quả, lại còn ám mùi như thế, nên ghét lắm.

Giờ lớn rồi, tôi mới hiểu mùi tỏi trên tay mẹ không phải thứ có thể rửa trôi, vì nó là mùi của một đời lao động. Nó là thứ mùi gắn liền với căn bếp, với những bữa cơm mẹ nấu, với những hi sinh không tên mà mẹ chẳng bao giờ đòi ghi nhận. Hóa ra nó là thứ tình cảm lâu dài và bền bỉ nhất mà mẹ để lại trên da thịt mình.

Tôi thấy đó là một thứ mùi rất người. Một mùi khiến tôi ghen ghen nơi cổ họng mỗi khi nhớ về mẹ.



"On the way home, I passed a group of boys kicking around a cheap plastic football. It pulled me back to those evenings with my cousins, those slow hours when we didn't know what to do with ourselves and didn't care. I thought about all the versions of me that had moved through these streets. Some ran. Some drifted back. Some were still figuring out how to belong.

And then I thought of my parents, who are still at work while others their age had already stepped into quieter lives. And for a moment, I felt like I was walking not just for myself, but for them too."

Nhím,

*Chị cũng yêu
và nhớ Nhím nữa.*



Áo ba lỗ của bố (2023)

Bố có một vài chiếc áo ba lỗ mặc đã ngót nghét hơn chục năm. Vải áo đã giãn, điểm tuyết đôi ba vết chấm rách lỗ chỗ và bạc màu những vết ố của mồ hôi. Những chiếc áo bố luôn mặc ở nhà, mát mẻ và thoải mái, cái bụng tròn lồi lõ sau lớp vải mỏng. Những chiếc áo bố lồng dưới lớp sơ mi thô, chúng theo bố đi ra khắp công trình, hòa vào bụi phố và nắng gió. Nhiều lúc tôi hỏi vì sao bố chưa bỏ chúng đi. Mẹ cũng đã mua thêm nhiều lô áo mới cho bố mặc, vì áo mới chắc chắn sẽ dễ chịu hơn rồi. Thế nhưng, cứ vài hôm, mấy chiếc áo cũ lại quay về nằm yên trong giỏ quần áo, như đang “đòi” được gấp cẩn thận. Vâng, lại là chúng nó đấy.

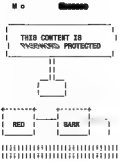
Bố nói không muốn bỏ: “Ồi dào, để lại thì cũng đâu thiệt ai.” Những chiếc áo đã theo bố lâu lắm rồi, áo mẹ mua, hồi ấy là hàng tuyển có tiếng đấy. Khi mới chuyển xuống Hà Nội, chưa kịp quen cuộc sống xô bồ, bố đã phải đội nắng mưa, lặn lội làm đủ thứ việc để kiếm sống. Cũng may có mẹ. Mẹ lúc ấy thì cũng chẳng khá hơn là bao, nhưng có bao nhiêu lại dành mua cho anh chồng đi làm vất vả cái này cái kia. “Mấy cái đầu thì rách tả tơi, bố đành bỏ. Nhưng cái áo này, đây này, mày xem, còn mặc được. Mày cứ gấp lại cho bố.”

Thật ra cũng lâu rồi tôi không còn thấy mấy chiếc áo ba lỗ quen thuộc ấy, một phần vì bố đang công tác xa nhà, phần nữa vì bố giờ đã tới cái tuổi thích tự mình quán xuyến mọi việc hơn là “Bố nhờ cái này một tí.” Tôi trân quý sự chần chừ ấy (dù với mẹ thì bố làm đến đâu ầu đến đấy), nhưng nhiều khi cũng mong bố chịu “giao việc” cho mình như hồi xưa.



; please be naked (2023)

the more i kept looking at this life progress bar on my notion landing page, the more i realized how short my life could possibly be. life is too short, but it's the longest thing you will ever do — or, if you will, be a part of. and it depressed the hell out of me, because soon i started wondering *whether i even want to do it.*



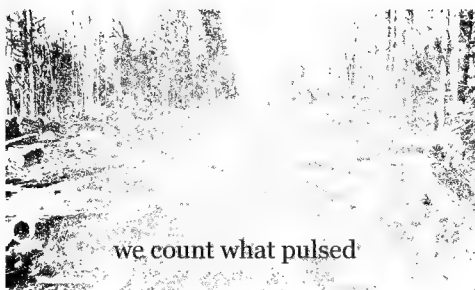
whenever i feel like having an existential crisis, one of the things that comes to my mind is taking off all my clothes, because i doubt they would function the way they're meant to. clothes are so heavy and restrictive, and the concept of wearing them just feels unnecessary to me. they're pretty distracting once in a while, if you want to know the truth, much like the terrible news you accidentally read early in the morning that sticks to your nerves for the rest of the day. i mean, i do enjoy styling them and seeing what looks good on me and all, but when you're having an existential crisis, none of these things matters anymore. it burdens you hot.

so,

shall we be naked for just a while?
(...)

; counting dead tree's rings (2025)

we cut to know
 how a tree sings.
 when the tree don't speak
 we slice it open
 and count the rings
 like goddamn accountants.



we count what pulsed

what was liminal

what slipped through
 seasons

what belonged to mother
 nature

and what once was

alive

now lying dead open.

; morning rituals (2025)

Waking up five minutes earlier than
 yesterday/ Given-Taken by ENHYPEN/ A
 light 10-minute stretch, starting from the
 toes/ Slipping on a heavy pinky ring/
 Reading a few pages from that sci-fi book/ If
 time allows, a quick sketch. Nothing
 polished, just flow/ Deep breaths.
 No digital devices allowed/

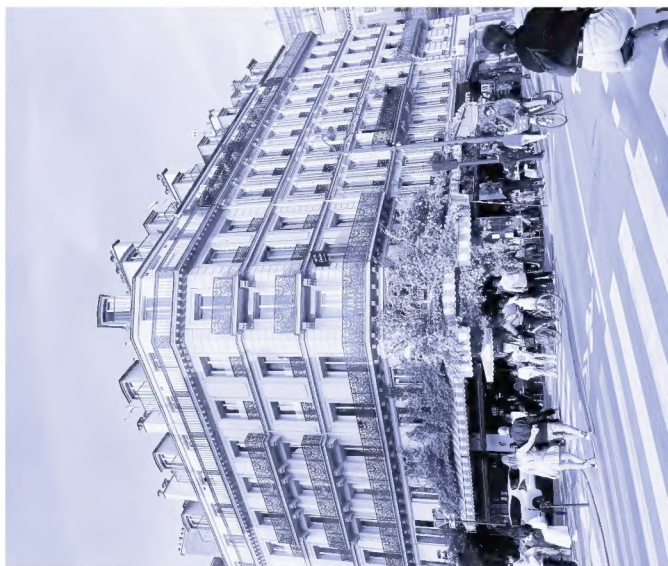
$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 & & \text{(___) \backslash} & & & & \\
 & & \text{(oo) \backslash \backslash} & & \text{(___) \backslash} & & \text{(___)} \\
 & / \text{---} \backslash / & \backslash & & \text{(oo) \backslash \backslash} & & \text{(oo)} \\
 * & / \text{---} \backslash / & \backslash & & / \text{---} \backslash / & & \backslash \text{---} \backslash / \\
 & | \text{---} | & & & | \text{---} | & & | \text{---} | \\
 & | \text{---} | & & & | \text{---} | & & | \text{---} | \\
 & \wedge \wedge & \wedge \wedge & & \wedge \wedge & & \wedge \wedge \\
 & & * & & & & * \\
 & & & & & & | \text{---} | \\
 & & & & & & | \text{---} | \\
 & & & & & & \wedge \wedge \quad \wedge \wedge
 \end{array}$$

If you've made it to this page, it means our walk together has come to an end. Thank you, truly, for staying with me. Did you perhaps discover something? Or find a space to sit with yourself somewhere along the way?

If it's the latter, I really hope you did.

"Home might feel different tonight, or not at all. Still, there's something ceremonial about walking through a city you're about to leave. Every sound feels sharper. Every corner you've passed a hundred times begins to glow with a different kind of familiarity.

And whatever the thoughts or feelings may be, everything should begin and end with a walk."



curator's note



From the very beginning, before I leave again was never meant to be a finished piece. So what you're holding feels more like a demo than a definitive version. There was no set beginning, no deadline, no polished arc. Most of my days revolve around timelines and expectations, so this project became a way to cut myself some slack, like an attempt to reassemble myself after a long period of creative silence.

Or perhaps it's just one version of a story I'll keep rewriting. I've been marinating the zine's idea for what feels like forever, looping through the same thoughts, unsure how to shape them into some kind of thematic framework. But then I had to remind myself this was never about perfection. This was always meant to be a space for wandering.

So, I won't pretend to wrap this up neatly. There was no grand revelation or epiphany at the end of the walk. You could say this zine holds a thread, yes, but it makes no demand for neatness. And right now, in the state I'm in, that rawness is the realest thing I can offer.

That's also to say, if someday I feel the pull to rewrite it, cut it apart, shift the tone, or try new visuals again, I will. This version leaves room for the freedom to cultivate ideas and experiment.

I'd love to thank my friend, Nghia Tran, for the photos from his Europe trip, and chị Nhật Phương—a beautiful writer and artist I was lucky to encounter in the kinder corners of the internet—for inspiring the mantras I wrote.

Thank you for being here and for walking with me, even if just for a little while.

xo, aubrey

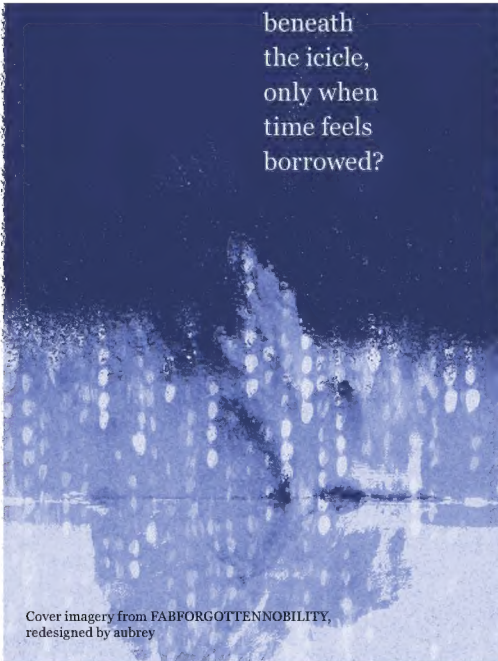


before I leave again

What do
we
confront
when we
prepare
to leave?

(2025) ISSUE 01

What
truths
surface
beneath
the icicle,
only when
time feels
borrowed?



Cover imagery from FABFORGOTTENNOBILITY,
redesigned by aubrey